

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Success Stories



HEALTHY PLYMOUTH



“We’re all working together to encourage healthier eating habits among our kids — we’re all on the same page regarding developing a Healthy Plymouth. This collaboration really spans from the Superintendent of Schools all the way down to the students.”

MARCIA RICHARDS
HEALTHY PLYMOUTH
NUTRITION FACILITATOR

Implementing School Nutrition Standards with Strong School Ties

SUMMARY

As Massachusetts schools are beginning to implement the new school nutrition standards, Healthy Plymouth found success by partnering with key stakeholders in schools and in the community. By working closely with school food staff and engaged parents, Healthy Plymouth has provided staff trainings on serving healthier foods and is educating students on the importance of healthy eating. As a result, Plymouth has found tremendous success engaging the right players to implement the school nutrition standards in all of its public schools.

CHALLENGE

In Plymouth, one in three school children are either overweight or obese.¹ Because of the amount of time children spend there, schools have a unique opportunity to create an environment that encourages students to eat healthy and be active.

Patrick Van Cott, School Food Service Director for Plymouth Public Schools, is spearheading the implementation of new state and federal school nutrition standards. Through the Mass in Motion program, Registered Dietician Marcia Richards partnered with Van Cott to provide resources and skills to support the implementation of the new nutrition standards. Together, they formed Healthy Plymouth Nutrition: a group of engaged community members and organizations committed to improving the health of all Plymouth residents.

SOLUTION

To boost sales of the healthier options, Healthy Plymouth provided workshops for school staff, faculty, parents, and community groups regarding the health benefits associated with the new school nutrition standards. Healthy Plymouth also looked to parents for their insight on how to boost sales. Two enthusiastic parents, Amy Palmer and Steve Dunn, developed a survey with Healthy Plymouth to evaluate student lunch preferences. The survey will be conducted in one middle school before the end of the year.

In addition to parents, students were another natural partner in transforming school food. Healthy Plymouth is working with Health and Physical Education teacher at Plymouth North High School Jane Burt to educate students on teens’ specific nutrient needs.

¹ 2011 School BMI data for children in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10

PARTNERS

Plymouth residents, health and human service agencies, WIC, Director of Plymouth School Health Advisory Council, hospital employees, dietitians, and several parents.

CONTACT

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RESULTS

Students have transferred the information they learned in class into developing new healthy sandwich recipes that are consistent with the school nutrition standards. Healthy Plymouth believes that engaging students in creating these sandwiches makes them more likely to eat them. The next step for these “sandwich creations” is a nutrition analysis, then the sandwiches will be named and marketed in the cafeteria. The students will help promote them as “grab and go” items in the cafeteria and encourage other students to buy them.

Jane Burt’s students are also developing a survey to gauge high school students’ preferences of school foods. Throughout the course of this work, students involved have become some of the most vocal supporters of upcoming menu changes, and the schools see this as a significant step towards boosting sales and improving the health of students.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The student-developed survey, along with the parent-developed survey, will be conducted in the spring of 2013, and results and recommendations will be widely distributed among Healthy Plymouth members, school staff and parents. In addition, the plans for sandwich creations will move forward, as the goal is to sell three student-developed sandwiches that meet new federal and state guidelines.



For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion